

DISTRICT NEWS



Sgt. Jimmie Perkins

(Left) Retired 1st Sgt. Finney Gregg, Director of the Montford Point Marine Museum, Jacksonville, N.C., holds the proclamation from Governor Mike Easley, proclaiming Feb. 23 - 28, “Men of Montford Point Excellence in Leadership Week.” (Right) Brigadier Gen. John Thomas, Chief Information Officer, USMC, gives a pre-game pep talk before the men’s finals of the 2004 CIAA Basketball Tournament. “In the Marine Corps we succeed or fail on the field of battle as a team, and here, tonight, the team that stands victorious at the end will be the one that plays with the best teamwork,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas.



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Marine heritage honored at 2004 CIAA tournament

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MCRC

In the midst of a celebration of youthful energy and achievement at the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association 2004 Basketball Tournament, a moment honoring achievements of the past helped the Marine Corps make its mark on the annual event.

In front of the nearly 20,000 college basketball fans in attendance at RBC Center, here for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities national basketball tournament, Montford Point Marines were given a rousing standing ovation.

Sixty years ago, the Montford Point Marines swore to defend the constitution of the United States while living and training at Montford Point, N.C., now known as Camp Johnson. More than 20,000 Marines stationed there between 1942 and 1949 made history as the first

African-Americans to serve in the Marine Corps.

This year they were honored center court, during halftime at the CIAA Basketball Tournament, for opening the door to opportunities for African-Americans in the United States Marine Corps.

“This is all very gratifying for us, and hopefully these young people here will question and learn about our experiences and contributions,” said retired 1st Sgt. Finney Gregg, Director of the Montford Point Marine Museum, Jacksonville, N.C.

During the week of the tournament, North Carolina Governor, Mike Easley, and the Mayor of Raleigh, Charles Meeker, officially recognized the ‘Men of Montford Point, both proclaiming February 23 - 28 as, “Men of Montford Point Excellence in Leadership Week.”

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of their incredible adventure as U.S. Marine pioneers, it is a unique way of providing inspiration in the lives of young people,” said Brig. Gen. John Thomas, the Chief Information Officer for the Marine Corps. “The Marine Corps is especially proud to honor the ‘Men of Montford Point’ during this year’s CIAA tournament, in recognition of Black History Month. These brave men are a living testament to the African-American spirit and are a symbolic reminder of how far we have come as a nation.”

During the 2003-2004 college basketball season the United States Marine Corps partnered with the CIAA in events at each of its 12 conference schools. This partnership with the CIAA brought the Marine Corps to this year’s tournament at the RBC Center in Raleigh, N.C.

“The Marine Corps is proud to participate for the fourth consecutive year at the CIAA Basketball Tournament,” said Capt. Marc Cole, diversity-marketing officer, Marine Corps Recruiting Command.

The CIAA is the country’s oldest African-American athletic conference. The Marine Corps has fostered relationships with HBCUs as it works to build leaders and attract highly qualified African-American officer candidates. As part of this year’s tournament, Marine Corps officers appeared at CIAA events throughout the Raleigh area to spread the Marine Corps’ message of inclusion and opportunity.

“Historically Black Colleges and Universities are extremely important to the Marine Corps as we continue to build leaders and attract qualified African-American officer candidates,” said Cole.

“It is vitally important that we continue to foster the development of tomorrow’s leaders and we applaud the role of the CIAA in providing a forum that highlights leadership, academic excellence and civic responsibility,” he added.

Marine gains discipline, loses weight

After losing close to 100 pounds, this self-proclaimed couch potato became one of the few and proud.

Sgt. David Salazar  
MPA, RS Fort Lauderdale

“The change is forever.”

No truer words have been spoken about the remarkable transformation undergone by Pfc. Jesus Vega.

The newly trained Marine on Permissive Recruiter Assistance Program orders at Recruiting Substation Fort Pierce, Fla., breathed new life into the Corps’ old motto by taking initiative to change his 305-pound body into the lean, mean, fighting machine he is today.

The year-long journey that took the 20-year-old, 2001 graduate of South Fork High School from hefty to healthy began in January 2003.

Having participated in Army Reserve Officer Training Corps activities during high school, Vega approached the local Army recruiter for information on joining – only to find his knock on that door of opportunity would go unanswered.

“I wanted to get more information and see if I could join the Army – but they wouldn’t give me the time of day,” Vega recalled. “I knew the Marine Corps had tough weight restrictions, so I hadn’t thought about going to them, but the Army recruiter told me that I should.

“Then I thought: ‘Well they are the toughest’ – and that’s what I wanted, so I went down to talk to Staff Sgt. (Joshua) Nesselhauf.”

Though he initially had reservations of his own, Nesselhauf, the canvassing recruiter assigned to Permanent Contact Station Jensen Beach, gave the then-heavy Vega two hours of his time.

Nesselhauf made it very clear that in his present state, Vega was not qualified to join the Corps. So the two made a deal: if Vega could drop 15-20

pounds in a few months, Nesselhauf would invest more time in helping him get into shape – and more importantly – help him attain his goal of losing close to 100 pounds to meet the requirement to join the Delayed Entry Program.

Vega didn’t take that gamble lightly.

“That was a big wakeup call for me,” confessed the Stuart, Fla. native. “But I knew I had to do it. I talked to my girlfriend that night and told her: ‘I’ve got to get out of here. I have to make a better life for myself.’”

Then Vega, a self-proclaimed couch potato at the time, took matters into his own hands and began to run regularly and cut fast food out of his diet.

In one month’s time, a 274-pound Vega returned to PCS Jensen Beach for a follow up with Nesselhauf.

“I was shocked,” Nesselhauf said.

But the gesture showed Vega was worth the recruiter’s time.

“The fact that he put forth all of that effort to lose that amount of weight so quickly showed me he was serious about his goals – so I invited him out to our pooler meetings and invited him to come PT with us,” Nesselhauf said.

On Aug. 28 – just eight months after his initial visit – Vega had shed 96 pounds and joined the Marine DEP.

“He was almost in tears,” recalled Staff Sgt. Ric Wagner, RSS Fort Pierce’s staff non-commissioned officer-in-charge.

Then Vega shed an additional 17 pounds to make his shipping weight requirement and found himself on the renowned yellow footprints at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island Nov. 3, 2003.

Not even the fear normally evoked by the receiving drill



Sgt. David Salazar

Private First Class Jesus Vega, a Marine currently on Permissive Recruiter Assistance Program orders at Recruiting Substation Fort Pierce, holds out a picture of himself at 305 pounds — just prior to expressing his interest in joining the Corps.

instructor could shake Vega.

“I left Fort Pierce with a positive attitude because of the recruiters there,” Vega said. “They talked to me every day and asked, ‘You’ve come all this way, why should you stop now?’”

Vega didn’t stop. He graduated recruit training Jan. 30 as a squad leader.

The new Marine returned to PCS Jensen Beach one more time in an effort to perpetuate motivation amongst men and women in his former situation.

“All I want to do is inspire someone,” Vega said. “I want to make a difference in someone that’s heavy and tell them that life isn’t about sitting around and having things handed to you – you have to get up and make those changes on your own.”

FRAUD,  
Continued from Page 1

information, such as social security number, credit card number, or other identifying information, to commit fraud or other crimes.

Once identity thieves obtain enough personal information, they can use it to apply for loans, open up a new credit card account, establish a phone or wireless service, or even open a bank account and write bad checks, leaving victims with marred credit that can take years to resolve.

Researchers determined that identity theft is a growing crime, with a significant increase in cases reported during the past three years.

“Identity theft is more widespread and pernicious than previously realized,” said Betsy Broder, assistant director of Planning and Information for the FTC.

As a result, FTC representatives said they will continue to remain vigilant in protecting consumers from identity theft by collecting com-

plaints and providing victim assistance throughout their Web site located on the Web at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft).

“It’s a battle trying to keep up with the people who want to break into your personal information system,” added Bill Knepp, manager for Navy Federal Credit Union aboard the Depot.

Knepp said NFCU has taken similar steps by dropping the first 12 numbers of a person’s card number off all transaction receipts.

The Social Security Administration has also begun taking steps to prevent identity theft by removing the first five numbers of a person’s social security number from the millions of checks it issues.

Anyone who suspects that someone else is using their social security number should report the problem to the Social Security Administration by calling their fraud hotline at 1-800-269-0271, or by logging on to their Web site at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).